Educational Philosophy of Boko-haram:
Analysis from Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

The Nigerian armed forces are doing their utmost to crush the Boko-haram insurgency. However, killing and dislodging members of the group does not indicate total elimination of its ideology. The arguments of the movement against conventional education remain in circulation among people awaiting another generation to champion the course in a new identity. To eradicate the ideology and its influence, there is need for thorough intellectual and logical responses to those arguments. It is against this background that this paper

sought to analyse the movement's arguments that conventional education should be prohibited on the ground that it originated from the West and was introduced in the country to promote Christianity. The paper realized that this argument is unfounded because conventional education is not a western property, rather a global heritage comprising the remarkable contributions of the Muslim world. Moreover, Islam does not forbid Muslims to benefit from any useful knowledge irrespective of where it originates from as long as it does not contravene Islamic teachings. It also found that using schools for promoting Christianity is no more applicable to many public and private schools in Nigeria today. The paper encouraged Muslims to pursue the education to its highest level.

Keywords: Boko-haram, Conventional education, Islam, Muslims, Nigeria.

1.   Introduction

With the advent of Islam in Nigeria, the Islamic scholarship was well established in the North, and the religion and its educational system spread to some parts of the South. The Islamic educational curriculum did not only incorporate spiritual and moral aspects, but also covered other areas of studies like economics social and pure sciences (Gada 2010, p. 47). However, with the arrival of British colonialists alongside Christian missionaries in 19th century in the South and early 20th century in the North, conventional education was introduced. The introduction was met with stiff resistance in the North due to the scepticism of the people who were predominantly Muslims, about the perceived Christianisation of the region by the missionaries through their schools. For a long time, the Muslim leaders in the North successfully resisted the intrusion of conventional education into the area, but they later allowed it with the condition that their religion and culture would not be interfered with (Muhammad 2010, p. 18).

While concerted efforts by different Muslim leaders and organisations for total Islamisation of the newly introduced education are ongoing due to it obvious benefits, there exist in the country, a number of people who still maintain that conventional education is a taboo and those who adopt it are considered heretics. This individual ideology metamorphosed into the movement known as "Nigerian Taliban" under the leadership of Muhammad Ali and Abu Umar. The group was exterminated by the Nigerian forces in 2003 (Kyari 2014, p. 12). The appearance of Boko-haram to revive the ideas of the so-called "Nigerian Taliban" is a clear indication that the use of force alone, may play a very remarkable role in hibernating the ideology, but cannot completely eliminate it. The killing and dislodging of members of Boko-haram today do not imply that the deviant idea is dead. The cassettes, compact disks (CDs) and booklets carrying the arguments and ideologies of the movement remain in local circulations couple with the fact that members

of the group are still alive, some in hiding and others in flaunting. It should also be noted that there exist a number of individuals who also harbour the same ideology but are not members of the group. With the passage of time, a new generation will come and will be influenced by these factors to champion the course and try to avert the mistakes of the past. Therefore, the Boko-haram challenge is more of ideological challenge than military one. To completely overcome it, there is need for intellectual and rational responses to the arguments raised by the movement to kick against conventional education.

The arguments raised by the group are multi-faceted. Some of which relate to the origin of the education and purpose of introducing it in the country, while others relate to its curriculum contents and the environment in which it is taught. In view of the fact that this paper cannot examine all the arguments, it attempted to critically analyse the first part of the arguments, which is the origin of the conventional education and purpose of introducing it in Nigeria, but before that, attempt would be made to give a brief account of Boko-haram movement and its ideology.

2. A Brief Account of Boko-Haram Movement and Ideology

The official name of the movement is "Jama'at Ahl al-Sunnah li al-Da'wahwa al-Jihad" meaning (The Group of the People of Sunnah for Preaching and Jihad), but people, and the media in particular, prefer to call it Boko-haram, in reference to one of its cardinal ideologies which prohibition of studying conventional education.

Boko in classical Hausa language means fake, deceit or deception. It is often used to connote "fake or deceitful bride" (*amaryar boko*). Such bride, mostly the bride's grandmother, was used in place of the real bride when being taken to her new home to make fun of the situation especially, when the groom gets to see who the bride is. Hence, the phrase *"makarantar boko"* in Hausa language means "fake or deceitful school" because at the initial stage, conventional schools were used to convert Muslims to Christianity (Muhammad 2010, pp. 46-47). While *haram* is Arabic word which means prohibited or forbidden (Baydoun 2001, p. 153). Therefore, "Boko-haram" technically means conventional education is forbidden.

As a movement, Boko-haram is a group of young Muslims, mostly from North Eastern Nigeria, who isolated themselves from the society and decided to fight the existing political and educational system of the country. Their main ideology is that since Islam and its laws are superior to all other laws and systems, and since Muslims have the *Shari*'ah which contains sufficient guidance for their religious, social, economic, political and educational systems, then it is forbidden for them, in whatever reason, to live under any system of governance other than the *Shari'ah*. Accepting any law or partaking in any

political or administrative system that is man-made, such as democracy and secularism, is not only forbidden but also tantamount to *kufr* (disbelief). Furthermore, given that the conventional educational system which is functioning in Nigeria does not only serve the non-Islamic democratic system by producing people who are loyal to democracy and, having originated from the West and contained subjects, topics and concepts that are against the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah, then, according to them, it is *haram* (forbidden) (Lamido 2018, p. 7).

Boko-haram movement emerged early 21st century as a peaceful movement calling the youth via public lectures and sermons to shun in existing conventional education, avoid participating in politics, public and civil services, and work towards ousting the entire Nigerian polity and replacing it with the *Shari*'ah (Lamido 2018, p. 7). After winning a number of youth who accepted its call, the group organized itself into a structured command with Muhammad Yusuf as the Commander-in-Chief otherwise known as the *Amiral-Am*. Each state command has its *Amir* or Commander, just as each Local Government Area has its own coordinator. At all the different levels, the followers constitute the subjects (Muhammad 2010, pp 44-45). Apart from the spiritual and educational engagements, they are equally structured to perform physical and military drills (Murtala 2013, pp. 19-20).

In June 2009, the rejection of members of Boko-haram to abide by the Federal Government of Nigeria's directive of wearing motorcycle helmet led to violent clashes between the movement and the Nigerian security forces. The clashes resulted in maiming and killing of a large number of the group's members including Muhammad Yusuf himself on 30th July, 2009. (The Guardian, 2009) From then to date, the group turned to militant and violent in pursuit of their ideology, engaging in arson, bombing, shooting, stabbing with disdain and impunity, targeting public institutions, places of worship, schools, markets, etc (Opeloye 2012, n.p).

The Boko-haram insurgency has serious devastating effects on almost all spheres of life in the nation at large, particular the north-east. Education, as observed by Lamido (2018, p. 7), is one of the most affected sectors by the harmful acts of the insurgents. For example, findings by the Human Rights Watch (2016) reveal that between 2009 and 2015, the insurgents destroyed over 910 schools, abducted over 2000 students, killed 610 teachers and displaced almost one million children of school age in 13 towns within Adamawa, Borno, Gombe, Bauchi and Yobe States. The report also shows that in 22 of the 27 local government areas of Borno State, all the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions were completely closed down for over two years, while even in the State capital, Maiduguri, schools could only reopen after relocating most of the internally displaced persons who were hitherto encamped therein.

3. Major Arguments of Boko-Haram

Muhammad Yusuf emphatically articulates his movement's view and position on conventional education in a number of occasions. For example, in his debate with Shaykh Isa Ali Pantami, Yusuf defines conventional education as: "The body of knowledge that came to us through European colonialists which includes medicine, technology, geography, physics and others, including the English language" (Umara 2015, p. 17).

While in his debate with Malam Idris Abdul-Aziz, he clearly declares his position on the education saying, "Western education as taught in the kinds of schools we have in Nigeria is *haram*" (Adeyanju 2018, p. 4).

Having listened to several Muhammad Yusuf's lectures and sermons, the major arguments of his movement for kicking against conventional education as articulated by him are summarised below:

i. Missionaries and colonialists brought conventional education and established schools in Nigeria as a means of Christianisation. In some government and Christian missionary-controlled schools, there is pressure on Muslim children to convert to Christianity, and some Muslims children have left Islam, therefore taking children to conventional educational system amounts to Christianising such children which is *haram* in Islam. He justifies his argument with quotations from the glorious Qur'an and Ahadith. From the Qur'an, the verse often quoted by Muhammad Yusuf is (Adeyanju 2018, p. 6):

    O you who believe, save yourselves and your families from a fire whose fuel is men and stones; over it are angels stern and strong, they do not disobey Allah in what He commands them, and do as they are commanded (Qur'an 66:6).

He claims that taking one's children to conventional schools is tantamount to casting them in the Hellfire contrary to saving them from it as commanded by the verse (Yusuf, 2008).

As to the Hadith, he frequently quotes the Hadith narrated by Abu Hurayrah that the noble Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) says:

> Every child is born innately submitting to Allah, it is his
> parents that change him to either a Jew or a Christian or a
> Pagan (Sahih al-Bukhari: Hadith No. 6926).

He asserts that one of the different means of changing the child from natural state on which he was created is enrolling him in the conventional schools. (Yusuf, 2008)

Other two ahadith usually quoted by him are:

> First, Hadith recorded by Imam Ahmad from Jabir bin Abdullah that; Umar bin al-Khattab came to the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) with a book that he took from some of the People of the Book. Umar began reading it to the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) who became angry. He said: Are you uncertain about it Ibn al-Khattab? By the One in Whose Hand is my soul! I have come to you with it white and pure. Do not ask them about anything, for they might tell you something true and you reject it, or they might tell you something false and you believe it. By the One in Whose Hand is my soul! If Musa (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) were alive, he would have no choice but to follow me (Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hambal: Hadith No. 15195).

> Second, Imam Ahmad also recorded a narration from Abdullah bin Thabit who said, Umar came to Allah's Messenger (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) and said; `O Messenger of Allah! I passed by a brother of mine from (the tribe of) Qurayzah, so he wrote some comprehensive statements from the Tawrah for me, should I read them to you?' The face of Allah's Messenger (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) changed (with anger). So I said to him: `Do you not see the face of Allah's Messenger?'' Umar said, `We are pleased with Allah as our Lord, Islam as our religion, and Muhammad (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) as our Messenger.' So the anger of the Prophet subsided, and he said, By the One in Whose Hand is Muhammad's soul, if Musa appeared among you and you were to follow him, abandoning me, then you would have strayed. Indeed, you are my share of the nations, and I am your share of the Prophets' (Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hambal: Hadith No. 15903).

ii.   Content of some subject's conflicts with explicit texts of the Qur'an. For example:

- Darwin's theory of evolution conflicts with a number of Qur'anic verses which explains the origin of man. For example, in Surah al-Baqarah (Qur'an 2:30-39), Surah al-Nisa" (Qur'an 4:1) and Surah al-A'raf (Qur'an 7:11-25).

- Democracy as taught in Common Law asserts that constitution is superior to Divine Law. This clearly conflicts with the verses which affirm the supremacy of Allah's law and the necessity of rejecting any law other than it. Such as: Qur'an 5:50, Qur'an 9:31 and Qur'an 42:21.

- Theory of "Water Cycle" conflicts with the verses that explain that rain is from Allah and has nothing to do with the sun. Such as Qur'an 2:22, Qur'an 16:10 and Qur'an 24:43.

iii. The learning environment of the conventional schools only promotes immorality, immodesty, promiscuity, nudity, *ikhtilat* (intermingling or free mixing between opposite sexes), cultism, emulating non-believers in language, dress, titles, holidays, and many other reprehensible acts which ultimately lead to infidelity; for the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) is reported to have said:

> He is not one of us who imitates a people other than us. Do not imitate the Jews and Christians *(*Sunan al-Tirmithi: Hadith No. 2695). According to another version: Whoever imitates a people is one of them (Sunan Abi Dawud: Hadith No. 4033).

4. Position of Islam On Conventional Education

To respond to the first claim, it is logical to begin with the exposition of Islamic position on conventional education. Scholars of Islamic jurisprudence classify actions requiring an Islamic verdict into two broad categories: *Ibadat* and *Mu'amalat*. The former refers to absolute acts of worship such as *Salat*, *Zakat*, *Siyam* and *Hajj*. While the later covers all human actions that do not fall under *Ibadat* such as food and drinks, buying and selling, marriage, agriculture, healthcare, and all forms of social, administrative, political, and economic transactions. The Islamic Maxim guiding *mu'amalat* is *"al-asl fi al-ashya al-ibahah"* meaning "the fundamental premise of things permissibility." In other words, everything is permissible except what is clearly prohibited from an explicit text of the Qur'an or authentic Hadith (al-Qaradawi 1985, p. 20).

Conventional education falls under *mu'amalat*, therefore, is *halal* (permissibility) except if proven *haram* (prohibited) by an explicit text of the *Shari'ah*. Thus, the task before the

anti-bokos is to provide evidence for its prohibition. However, if anything in the contents and methods of conventional education contradicts the clear teachings of Islam and its objectives, that aspect of the content or methodology is prohibited, not the education as a whole.

5. Conventional Education: Western or Global?

There is no doubt about the fact that conventional education was introduced in Nigeria by colonialists alongside missionaries. However, introducing the education and attributing it to them does not confer on them its ownership. Conventional education is neither western property nor Christian possession; it is rather the accumulated human heritage from different previous and contemporary civilisations and cultures, such as Greek, Indian, Roman, Islamic and others. No one can take credit or claim ownership of it all (Da'awa Institute of Nigeria 2017, p. 7). Every invention is built on earlier knowledge received from others and ultimately from Allah the Source of all knowledge, "Who taught by the pen, and taught mankind what he knew not" (Qur'an 96:5).

During the golden age of the Islamic empire, at a time when Western Europe was intellectually backward and stagnant; it is historically acknowledged that Islamic scholarship flourished with an impressive openness to the rational sciences, arts, and even literature. It was during this period that the Islamic world made most of its contributions to the scientific and artistic world. Islamic scholars preserved much of the knowledge of the Greeks that had been prohibited by the Christian world. Other outstanding contributions were made in areas of Chemistry, Botany, Physics, Mineralogy, Mathematics, and Astronomy, etc, as many Muslim thinkers regarded scientific truths as tools for accessing religious. This, therefore, explains why today's advancement in Science and Technology often acknowledge the contributions of notable Muslim scholars like al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Jabir, among others (Muhammad 2010, p. 54).

The so-called "conventional" or "secular" education is simply what has been re-packaged by the "West" after adding to what was received from the heritage of humanity throughout history in various parts of the globe, including that of the Islamic world. It is therefore not American, British, or European education, but a culmination of knowledge and legacies from ancient times till date, which can in reality be termed "global education" (Da'awa Institute of Nigeria 2017, p. xiii).

6. Does Non-Islamic Origin of Knowledge Render It *Haram?*

It is pertinent to note that Islam does not classify information or knowledge on the basis of its geographical location or cultural origin, but on the basis of its usefulness or otherwise, and whether it contradicts the Islamic primary sources of information, the Qur'an and

Sunnah or not. It accepts any useful knowledge which does not contradict any clear text of the sources and rejects whatever contradicts them (Da'wah Coordination Council of Nigeria 2009, p. 11).

Importance of all useful knowledge, information and wisdom irrespective of where it originates from is emphasized in the Qur'an and prophetic narrations. Allah says:

> And We sent not (as Our Messengers) before you (O Muhammad) any but men, whom We sent Revelation. So ask AhlAdh-Dhikr, if you know not (Qur'an 16:43).

Scholars of *Tafsir* stated that (*Ahlal-Dhikr*) in this context refers to the people of the previous Books, the Jews and the Christians (Ibn Kathir, 1st ed, 1998, vol. 4, p. 573). This implies that Allah commands people to seek from them the knowledge of what they are acquainted with. This divine commend is directed to both Muslims and non-Muslims.

The Sunnah contains narrations of the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) and his companions using knowledge that originate from non-Muslims. For example:

> Zaid bin Thābit narrated: „The Messenger of Allah (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) ordered me to learn some statements from the writings of the Jews for him and he said: "For indeed by Allah! I do not trust the Jews with my letters." He said: Half of a month did not pass before I learned it for him." He added: "After I learned it, when he wanted to write to the Jews I would write it to them, and when they wrote to him I would read their letters to him" (Sunan Abi Dawud, Hadith No. 3647).

The Jewish language is not different from English or any other European language considering the fact that they are of non-Islamic origin. In fact, this similarity applies to many languages today. If the Messenger of Allah (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) would instruct his companion to learn the language of his most brutal enemies, learning other's languages is therefore permissible. It may even become obligatory in certain conditions. It will also be deduced from the Hadith that Zaid ibn Thabit definitely learnt it from non-Muslim, probably from the Jews themselves; because if a companion of the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) was good at the language at that point in time, he would have relied on him rather than instructing Zaid to learn it, or command Zaid to study it from that companion who knew it.

Another instance is what Ikrimah reported that Ibn Abbas said:

> Some of the prisoners on the day of Badr did not have any ransom, so the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) made it their ransom to teach the children of *Ansar* how to write. One day a boy came crying to his father, who said: what is the matter with you? He said: my teacher hit me. He said: the evil one is seeking vengeance for the people thrown into the well at Badr. By Allah, you will never go to him again (Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hambal, Hadith No. 2216).

This narration also indicates that Islam does not prohibit Muslims from learning and using knowledge that originates from non-Muslims and does not also prohibit learning from non-Muslim tutor because the Arab prisoners were Pagans.

Another narration from A'ishah reports that Allah's

Messenger (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) accepted to be guided through the desert from Makkah to Madinah by Abdullah bin Uraiqit who was a pagan Arab but deeply knowledgeable about the terrain and directions in the desert (Mustadrak al-Hakim, Hadith No. 4282).

He also accepted an idea from Salman Al-Farisi that originated from a Persian military defence strategy. This was the idea of digging a trench or ditch (*khandaq*) which was used to protect the city of Madinah from the invading army of the Quraysh and their allies during the Battle of the Trench (Ibn Hajar 2nd ed. 2002, vol. 7, p. 393).

These narrations, like the aforementioned, indicate that Islam does not prohibit Muslims from learning and using knowledge that originates from non-Muslims as long as it is useful and does not contravene any Qur'anic or Hadith text. However, this applies to knowledge that relate to *mu'amalat*, but as far as *aqidah* (creed) or *ibadat* (rituals) related knowledge is concerned, it must originate from Islamic reliable source(s) and be taught to Muslims by Muslims. This represents the opinion of most scholars.

7. With Change in Circumstance Comes Change in Fatwa

Certainly, when conventional education was introduced in Nigeria "it was Christian sponsored, and Christian missionary schools were established primarily to convert people to Christianity, the education was therefore seen as a threat to Islamic faith" (Fafunwa, 1975, 71). "This lent credence to the *ulama's* opposition against the newly introduced education at the initial stage" (Muhammad 2010, p. 18) But with the educational policies and reforms of the successive governments at both federal and state levels, couple with the concerted efforts of various Islamic organisations to ensure that the educational system is

compatible with Islam and accommodating of Muslims sensitivities, the Christian missionary influence has been eliminated in many public and private schools, particularly the Muslim owned ones. In fact, many Muslim owned schools today do not only teach their students various fields of the Islamic education, but they also teach them the so called "conventional education". It is noteworthy that most high institutions of learning in the country have Department of Islamic Studies where Muslim scholars are trained to the highest level of academic learning. These schools and institutions are successfully producing *huffaz* (memorizers of the Qur'an), *imams*, *du'ats* (Muslim preachers), *qadis* and scholars of International repute. The argument that conventional schools are agent of Christianisation cannot therefore be used to prohibit Muslims from acquiring conventional educations in schools where this threat does not longer exist because according to a well-established legal maxim "With Change in Circumstance Comes Change in Fatwa" (Ibn al-Qayyim, 1st ed. 1999, p. 337). It is on this ground that well-grounded Muslim scholars as well as Islamic organisations in the country do not only encourage Nigerian Muslim *ummah* (nation) to study conventional education to its highest level of qualification, but also establish institutions where conventional education is taught. However, the argument against sending children to schools may apply to those missionary schools where children are actively converted to Christianity.

8. The Qur'anic and Prophetic Texts

With regard to the Qur'anic verse cited by Muhammad Yusuf to justify his claim:

> Save yourself and your families from the Fire (Qur'an 66:6).

And the Hadith of Abu Hurayrah:

> Every child is born innately submitting to Allah … (Sahih
> al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 6926).

This may apply to those missionary schools which are established to promote Christianity. Muslim scholars and Imams actively condemn sending children to such schools. However, this argument does not apply to many public and private schools today, particularly those owned by Muslims where both Islamic and conventional educations are taught. In fact, sending children to such schools is a means of saving them from Hellfire and setting them firmly established on Islam. (Da'awa Institute of Nigeria 2017, pp. 103-105)

Regarding the remaining two Ahadith cited by Muhammad Yusuf, is argument is unfounded because the Ahadith are weak due to availability of unreliable narrators in their isnads (chains of narrators). The first is recorded by Imam Ahmad, Imam Abu Ya'la and Imam al-Bazzar. Imam al-Haythami said: "Its isnad entails Mujalad ibn Sa'id who is

declared to be weak by Ahmad, Yahya ibn Sa'id and others" (Majma Zawa'id al-Haythami, Hadith No. 808).

Shaykh Shu'aib al-Arna'ut said: "Its isnad is weak due to the weakness of Mujalid ibn Sa'id" (Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hambal, Hadith No. 15195).

He also commented on the second that its isnad is weak because of the weakness of Jabir ibn Yazid al-Ju'fi. In addition to that, the Hadith is *Mudtarib* (shaky). (Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hambal, Hadith No. 15903)

Even if it is arguably accepted that the Ahadith are authentic, they are not indicating prohibition for studying conventional education because conventional education deals with *mu'amalat* not *aqidah* and *ibadat* which will not be taken except from authentic Islamic sources as explained above.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the above discussion, it is clear that forbidding Muslims in Nigeria from studying conventional education based on its origin and purpose of introduction is baseless. However, Muslim leaders, organisations and educationists should not relent in their efforts towards total Islamisation of the system in the country. Finally, in order to diligently combat the heretic ideology of *Jama'ahAhl al-Sunnah li al-Da'wahwa al-Jihad* and others with similar tendencies in the polity, the following recommendations are made:

1. Due to the close connection of the deviation of Boko-haram to religion, because they claimed to be Islamic movement, all eyes are on Muslim scholars and academics to emphasise the *Shari'ah* position on each and every issue raised by the group. These scholars and academics should therefore actively study all the elements of the ideology and, intellectually and logically address them.

2. Muslims in Nigeria, particularly the youth should be sensitized on this issue by positively utilizing all available means and platforms. The sensitization exercise should not neglect the rural areas where a good number of its inhabitants still harbour the misleading idea of prohibiting conventional education.

3. It is high time for religious organisations in Nigeria to begin to set out strict rules as to who speaks what in their names and block the free-to-air licence they accord to their young shall grow *Tullab al-'Ilm*who remain the sole targets of radicalism as in the case of ill-indoctrinated Boko-haram members.

4. There should also be well designed uniform curriculum by the federal and state ministries of education for *Islamiyyah* schools run by individuals and organizations to ensure proper monitoring and evaluation.

5. Military force alone cannot eliminate ideological insurgencies such as Boko-haram, so there should be synergy between government and scholars to map out   sound and well formulated intellectual counter-narratives to be circulated inform of books, pamphlets, sermons, radio and TV programs, jingles and documentaries to be made available in the public domains and educational institutions.

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